

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 2, 2004

CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit, Public Affairs Specialist, 413-253-4371, Diane.Petit@ma.usda.gov

Mass. farmers encouraged to sign up for federal conservation programs

Funding for Mass. increases by 65 percent

AMHERST, MA—Massachusetts farmers are encouraged to apply for nearly \$12.5 million in federal funding for conservation programs allocated by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the Bay State this fiscal year, a 65 percent increase over last year. The programs are administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"These funds will help Massachusetts landowners work in partnership with local NRCS field staff in maintaining high environmental stewardship in communities across the commonwealth," said State Conservationist Cecil B. Currin. "USDA remains committed to providing the conservation tools and resources to ensure that land in the Bay State remains both healthy and productive."

With financial and technical assistance from NRCS, farmers and other landowners will continue to promote environmental quality on farmland, address water quality and quantity challenges, protect prime farmland, and protect valuable wetland ecosystems and wildlife habitat.

Nationally, the FY 2004 allocations to states include \$1.2 billion in financial assistance and \$305 million for technical assistance for NRCS Farm Bill programs and other activities.

"Now that these funds have been allocated, our field offices can begin writing contracts with local farmers," said Currin. "These contracts will help ease the existing backlog in these popular programs improving soil, water, air and at-risk habitat on working lands."

Landowners are encouraged to sign up for these conservation programs by March 1. General information is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov. For more specific information, contact a local USDA Service Center (listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture).

(Fiscal year 2004 conservation program funding figures for Massachusetts follow.)

(MORE)

FY2004 Massachusetts Farm Bill Funding/p. 2

Massachusetts	FY2004	FY2003
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Through EQIP, farmers may receive financial and technical help with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land.	\$6,453,000	\$3,295,418
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) FRPP provides funds to purchase the development rights to farmland, preserving productive farmland for agricultural use.	\$3,926,200	\$2,932,471
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) GRP helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and certain other lands, and provides assistance for rehabilitating grasslands.	\$705,000	\$190,500
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) WRP offers an opportunity for landowners to voluntarily protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property.	\$535,000	\$890,000
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) WHIP is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to landowners who want to improve fish and wildlife habitat or restore natural ecosystems on their land.	\$875,000	\$907,955
TOTAL	\$12,494,200	\$8,216,344

#